Region's economy to nearly double in next 20 years, economist says

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The Washington area's economy will nearly double over the next 20 years, bringing in more than 1 million new jobs but also forcing local leaders to face tough questions about how to accommodate them, a new study predicts.

The District and its suburbs will see their gross regional product grow by more than 94 percent over the next two decades, George Mason University economist Stephen Fuller predicts in a new study by the 2030 Group, a nonprofit think tank founded by area businessmen. The study, released Thursday, predicts that the Washington area will be one of the nation's fastest-growing economies, behind Atlanta and Dallas-Fort Worth, through 2030.

The study predicts that up to 1.6 million new jobs will be created in the area; the jobs will bring in about 1.7 million new residents through 2030.

Experts say the region owes its rosy outlook to growth of the government, especially by defense, domestic security and financial regulatory agencies.

"Those federal areas are the ones that more often than not only lend themselves to federal employment but also to procurement and contract support," said David Robertson, executive director of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. "The federal government isn't going anywhere."

The Council of Governments found similar trends in its own study of the region's growth through 2050, Robertson said.

With all of these new people and jobs, the question is where to put them. Local leaders are weighing major development projects from Tysons Corner to high-rise developments around the New Carrollton Metro station. Area leaders have committed to "smart growth," building high-density, mixed-used neighborhoods close to mass transit.

But there are worries about the area's aging infrastructure.

"Now we have to think about this," Fuller told the Washington Examiner, "and we're going to have to pay the piper."

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